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KIRKSTALL ABBEY.



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KIRKSTALL ABBEY.

AN

IMAGINARY POEM:

IN THREE CANTOS.

BY

OSCAR SMYTHE LUSHINGTON.

LEEDS:

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1846.



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PREFACE.

In presenting the following trifle to the public eye, the humble author places his hopes of success, not upon the merits of the work,—for he is well aware that they are of the slightest order,—but upon the motive which has urged him to make the venture, and the indulgence of his readers.

To the Inhabitants of Leeds and its vicinity the author must ever feel himself bound by the strongest ties of gratitude,—their generosity and liberal patronage having, even previous to the publication of the poem, bid fair to enable him to accomplish the most important step towards future prosperity, by furnishing him with the means of obtaining his emancipation from the ranks of the army, and thereby restoring him to his former station in society.

With an assurance that his untiring study henceforth shall be to convince his patrons that their generosity has been neither uselessly nor undeservedly conferred,

He begs respectfully to subscribe himself
their obedient,
humble,
and obliged Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

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KIRKSTALL ABBEY.

CANTO THE FIRST.

Where gentle Airedale's tranquil streamlet flows
'Mid sedgy banks, where the wild pink-ey'd rose
And fragrant honey-suckles fan the breeze,
Which softly sighs among the rustling trees,
And, bending gracefully, their blossoms lave
With wanton kisses in the placid wave;—
Where the blithe robin hops from spray to spray,
And pours to Heaven his free and joyous lay,
And the brisk bee scatters the sparkling dew
From primrose-cups and nodding hare-bells blue;
There, with its ruin'd bell tower rearing high,
Pointing towards the smiling azure sky,
And overlooking verdant vale and mead,
Dappled with sheep and kine, and grazing steed,
Stands Kirkstall's hallowed, grey, and crumbling
 pile,

Where trav'liers often pause to gaze awhile
Upon the shatter'd arch and ivyed wall,
While thoughts of times long past the mind
 enthral.

There have I lov'd to roam, and conjure up
Those days when torch and sacramental cup

Glow'd on that altar, where now toad and snail
Crawl o'er the stones, and leave their loathsome
trail :—

When the high vaulted roof rang round and round
With the rich organ's thrilling, holy sound :—

When the long aisle, now mouldering to decay,
Was trod by monks, while rose the matin lay ;
Or the lone pilgrim, led by law divine
To pay his homage at the sacred shrine.

Those days have passed, and naught remains to
tell

The tale, save tott'ring wall and weed-chok'd cell ;
Yet still a hallow'd spirit seems to creep
Around the sepulchres, where, wrapt in sleep
Eternal, rest the bones of those who gave
The voice of life to transept, choir, and nave.
And tho' the ear can catch no floating breath
Of choral chant amid those halls of death—
Altho' the short view'd eye of man must fail
To penetrate the cold grave's mystic pale,
Imagination still may read a tale.

The sun had sunk behind the hill,
And nature's busy voice was still,
The latest bee had left the flower,
The butterfly slept in the bower ;
The blithest bird had ceas'd its song,
And naught, except the myriad throng
Of spotted moths and chaffers blind

Disturb'd the drowsy ev'ning wind.
The slimy snail and lazy toad
Crawl'd o'er the rugged, grassy road ;
And now and then a frighten'd hare
Sprang thro' the brake, and sought its lair.
Then all again was hush'd and still—
Save the grasshopper's chirrup shrill,
The corn-crake's distant lonely cry,
Or the chill night wind's mournful sigh.
In the far west, the orb of day
Still ting'd the clouds of leaden grey,
And spread an angry dusky glare
Throughout the silent realms of air :
And as it faint and fainter grew,
The sky assum'd a threat'ning hue.
Along the eastern horizon
The gloom of night came swiftly on ;
Pale sheets of lightning glimmer'd round,
And far away the boding sound
Of thunder came upon the breeze
Which sobb'd among the shiv'ring trees.
All told by tokens dark and drear
The dread Storm Demon hover'd near.

By Airedale's darkly gleaming tide
Two dusky forms were seen to glide
Among the hazels rank and tall
Which skirted Kirkstall's Abbey wall :
And as they slowly onward stroll'd,

Their earnest guarded converse told
The speakers were De Lacey's heir,
And his dark kinsman, Oswald Blair.

“ I tell thee, cousin Hildebrand,
The Lady Helen's dowried hand
Will ne'er be thine, if, like a child,
Thou think'st to win by measures mild.
Mark well my words—that hand's a prize
Whereon a host of greedy eyes
Already gloat; and there's among
The strugglers in the rival throng
A stranger knight, whose honour'd scars
Proclaim a hero from the wars;
And on his records proudly shine
Bright laurels won in Palestine.
On the young warrior, they say,
Fair Helen smiles right graciously.
I warn thee, and 'tis thine to prove
How his suit may affect thy love.”

So spoke Sir Oswald, while his eye
Gleam'd 'neath his brow maliciously,
As with a covert glance he scann'd
The features of Sir Hildebrand.

“ Oswald,” Sir Hildebrand exclaimed—
And while he spoke, his eye inflamed
By mingled fury and alarm

Flash'd fearfully ; he grasp'd the arm
Of Blair—"Oswald, now mark me well,
If truth sustains what thou dost tell,
At once my rival's name reveal,
And, by my soul, this thirsty steel
Shall drink his life's-blood ere the night
Again gives place to morning light.
But, if I find that thou hast strove
By artifice to cross my love,
And spot the lady Helen's fame—
Then swear I, by my halidame,
On thee shall fall my fury's storm ;—
I'll crush thee as I would a worm !"

" Right bravely spoken !—I applaud
Thy spirit ; but to think a fraud
So dastardly, so base, could ere
Invented be by Oswald Blair
Is most unjust, and much I grieve
That *thou* should'st deem I'd e'er deceive
The man I love—In whose cause I
Would gladly bleed, would freely die.
However, Hildebrand, to prove
My only wish is to remove
This love-wrought blindness from thine eyes,
All that within my power lies
I'll freely speak. His name, I own,
I cannot tell :—it is unknown
To all I've questioned ; but they say

He owes his birth to Italy.
But, listen: thou shalt quickly prove
If there be truth in Helen's love.
This very eve, within an hour,
The lovers meet in Kirkstall's bow'r.
Go, hide ye there, and let thine eyes
Bear witness that I speak not lies."

They parted; and Sir Hildebrand—
His ire by jealous passions fann'd
Almost to frenzy—bent his way
To where the Abbey gardens lay.
He reach'd a narrow, dusky glade,
And paus'd beneath the deep black shade
Of a tall yew. The thunder's roll
Struck terror to his shrinking soul;
And when the lightning's vivid play
Dispers'd the darkness transiently,
The fitful glimmer made him start:—
It seem'd as if around his heart
A host of fear-sraught demons stood,
And urg'd him to the deed of blood.
“Revenge! revenge!”—that fiendish cry
Seem'd borne upon the night-wind's sigh.
Just then a dark form caught his eye,
As 'mid the gloom it hurried by
His leafy covert. Quick as thought
His trembling hand the dagger sought:
Then stealthily, with scarce drawn breath

He trac'd its steps, until beneath
A thickly-woven copse it stay'd
And glanc'd along the dismal glade.
With noiseless steps the spot he neared ;—
But, lo ! the form had disappeared !
The knight peer'd round :—the lightning's glare
Just then burst forth, revealing where
A grass-chok'd, leaf-o'ershadow'd way
Branch'd off. A ruddy, trembling ray
Stream'd thro' a dark, sequester'd dell,
As from some hermit's lonely cell.
Onward he strode, and, like the hound
That scents its victim, crept around
And 'neath the gnarled trees. A sound
Of whisp'ring voices strikes his ear—
He stays his steps, and crouches near
A lowly hut ; the half-op'd door
Dimly reveals the fern-strewn floor :
And by the faint, uncertain light
A sickly lamp emits, a sight,
Which withers up his soul, he sees ;—
His very pulses seem to freeze :
For, 'mid the lurid, wav'ring glare,
A knightly form and lady fair
Stand closely lock'd in fond embrace !—
Vainly he strains his eyes to trace
Their features thro' the struggling gloom ;
But 'tis enough :—the stranger's doom
Is seal'd. The frantic Hildebrand

Feels well convinc'd the pair who stand
Before his reeling, blasted sight
Are Helen and the stranger Knight.

Anon, the Unknown left the cell,
And hurried onward thro' the dell ;
While, as the Indian tracks his foe
With wolf-like subtlety—e'en so
De Lacey hung upon his wake
Thro' bush and briar, furze and brake,
Until they reach'd the gloom-wrapt glade,—
Then, darting from his leafy shade,
He rais'd on high the gleaming blade—
And struck—alas ! too true—too well,—
His victim stagger'd—groan'd—and fell !

De Lacey for a moment stood
And gaz'd upon the deed of blood
With starting, fixed eyes, like one
Turn'd by some pow'rful spell to stone :—
Then stoop'd him down, and drew a-side
The mantle which had serv'd to hide
The visage. Just then thro' the air
The lightning shot with ghastly glare,
And serv'd the assassin to discover—
Great God !—that he had slain his brother !

One shriek—one horrid, piercing cry
Rang thro' the darkly frowning sky.

With hands convuls'd he wildly clasped
His throbbing temples, while he gasped
Like some half-strangled wretch, for breath;—
It seem'd as if the hand of death
Already shook his palsied frame—
His eye-balls roll'd like globes of flame.
The lightnings flash'd—the thunder roared—
The spouting rain in torrents poured,—
The mighty winds, which until then
Had slept, like lions from their den
Now rush'd abroad, and howling forth
Their fear-fraught, all-destroying wrath,
Swept wildly thro' the groaning wood,
And dash'd the voerwhelming flood
In a fierce, sheeting deluge o'er
Hill, valley, woodland, mead, and moor.

Away the wretched Hildebrand
Rush'd like a hunted beast—a band
Of vengeful fiends appear'd to hang
Around him; while the welkin rang
With goblin laughter, and the blast
Seem'd as it hurried madly past
To howl forth curses in his ear.
Denouncing voices far and near
Shreik'd thro' his whirling, frenzied brain—
“ Fratricide!—Murderer!—Second Cain!”

CANTO THE SECOND.

"Twas midnight ; and the moonlight pale
Shone over woodland, mead and vale :
And calmly fell the trembling beam
Upon sweet Airedale's placid stream
As onward flow'd the glassy tide
In all its clear, unruffled pride—
Save where, perchance, the nightfly's wings
Spread circlets bright of crystal rings ;
Or sportive trout, with sudden leap,
Disturb'd the quiet water's sleep.
All slumber'd—e'en the night-wind's sigh,
And silence reign'd o'er earth and sky.

Beneath the cold and pallid ray
Old Kirkstall's walls look'd lone and grey ;
And cold the mullion'd casements gleamed—
Save where, by clus'tring ivy screened,
One low-brow'd lattice shed a bright
Red beam upon the dusk of night :
There had it glow'd since vesper bell,
And mark'd the Father Martin's cell.

Shrouded by contemplation's guise,
The Father sat with shaded eyes,
And by the taper's wan light por'd
Intently o'er the Sacred Word.

A mystery hung o'er that man
Which tongue ne'er told, nor eye could scan.
'Twas said, the Father erst had been
A courtier gay—that pleasure's scene
Had once acknowledg'd him, of all,
The star at tilt and festival.
That grief its cank'ring seeds had sown
Within his heart, and weigh'd him down :
But when, or whence the blight had blown,
Apparently, to none was known.
One dark autumnal ev'ning, late,
He came to hallow'd Kirkstall's gate,
Array'd in humble pilgrim's gear,
And sought a sanctuary there.
His only joy—his spirit's food—
Seem'd constant pray'r and solitude :
For, in his cheerless, lonely cell,
From matin chime 'till curfew bell,
He pass'd the hours day after day,
With missal, cross, and rosary.

But those around him little guess'd
What passions riv'd the Father's breast.
E'en while the world's vain pomps he spurns,
Deep, dark despair his vitals burns ;
And while he scans the holy page,
Far other thoughts his mind engage.
The quiv'ring lip—the sunken eye—
Now dimm'd—now flashing fitsfully,

Tell the proud spirit finds no balm
Amid Religion's hallow'd calm.
In vain he kneels before the shrine—
In vain he prays for aid divine :
Oblivion cannot cast its shade
O'er the deep stain gone time hath laid
Upon his soul ; and, day by day,
The world asserts its sov'reign sway.

But, hark ! a sound, like beating rain,
Assails the narrow casement pane.
The recluse starts : right well he knows
The signal, and his cassock throws
More closely round his wasted frame ;
Then shades the flick'ring taper's flame,
And, while booms forth the midnight knell,
With noiseless steps he quits his cell.

Assisted by the sickly ray
The Father Martin wound his way
Thro' passages where light of day
Was never known to fall :
Where gloom and damp hung all around
And low-brow'd arches o'er him frown'd,
Nor tarried 'till he trod the ground
Beneath the cloister wall.

Deep midnight shadows fell upon
Grey pillar and moss-cover'd stone—

Save where a broad cold moonbeam shone
 In a still, silv'ry flood
 On the moist, glist'ning flags ; and there,
 Amid the pallid, spectral glare
 A cloak-wrapt form, of martial air,
 Like a dark statue stood.

The Stranger mark'd the wav'ring flame,
 As t'wards the spot the recluse came ;
 And, bending forward, breath'd a name
 Which, like some potent charm,
 Fell on the Father's startled ear ;
 His knees collaps'd and shook with fear,
 While with quick strides th' unknown drew
 near,
 And grasp'd him by the arm.

“ Ye know me not,” the figure cried,
 In accents deep—then cast aside
 The mantle which had serv'd to hide
 His face from idle gaze.

The Father strove in vain to fly—
 He quail'd as 'neath a spectre's eye,
 And gave a wild, unearthly cry
 Of terror and amaze.

“ Oh, God !” he faulter'd, “ has the tomb
 Re-op'd its dark and loathsome womb,

And yielded up its dead to call
For vengeance on the criminal :
Have the dread pangs of grief intense ;
The prayers deep of penitence ;
A soul by endless suff'ring riven
Fail'd to appease the wrath of Heaven ?”

“ De Lacey, list !” the Stranger said,
“ Thou lookest not upon the dead,—
'Tis I—thy brother, Ethelred !”

“ Almighty God !” De Lacey gasped,
While round his brother's neck he clasped
His trembling hands in close embrace—
“ I thank thee for thy bounteous grace !”
He said no more—joy and surprise
O'ercame his shaken faculties ;
And with a burst of idiot mirth
He swoon'd upon the dewy earth,

* * * * *

When he revived, with swimming eyes
He gaz'd around in mute surprise.
Within a rough-built hut he lay,
The roof of reeds, the walls of clay ;
His bed a heap of moss and fern :—
A flickering lamp which seem'd to burn
More to betray the murky gloom

Than to light up the narrow room,
Stood on a bracket by his side.
His brain span round, in vain he tried
To muse and call to mind aright
Th' adventures of the by-gone night.

While thus he lay confus'd, he thought
His ear a distant murmur caught :
He listen'd, and again the sound,
Like ringing laughter, echoed round.
With noiseless step he left his bed,
And search'd around the humble shed.
A rush-wove mat soon caught his eye,
Hanging upon the wall, close by :
Again loud laughter smote his ear,—
Just then a passing gust of air
The rude mat slightly rais'd,—a bright,
But transient gleam of ruddy light
Shot brilliantly athwart the gloom,
As from a secret inner room ;
De Lacey gently drew aside
The dangling curtain, and descried
By a huge log-fire's cheerful blaze
A scene which fill'd him with amaze.

Within a spacious cave, the sides
Of which were hung with red deer hides,
Bow, quiver, hunting-knife, and spear,
And all that form'd the huntsman's gear,

Some twenty stalwart men were seen
All clad in frocks of Lincoln green.
They sat around a rough-hewn board
With smoking venison amply stor'd,
And tankards bright of foaming beer,—
A goodly spread of English cheer.
The joke, the laugh, the merry song
Went briskly round the jovial throng:
For them in mirth Time dipp'd his wings,
And they were happier far than kings.

While he look'd on with wond'ring eyes,
A figure, clad in hermit's guise,
With cassock grey, and sable hood,
Approach'd the door-way where he stood.
De Lacey mark'd the figure well,
And gliding back into the cell,
He sought again his lowly bed:
Anon, with stealthy, noiseless tread,
The black-cowl'd Anchorite appeared,
And cautiously the pallet neared.

“Sir Hildebrand,” he softly said,—
De Lacey slowly rais'd his head,
As if but then arous'd from sleep,—
“Sir Hildebrand, I need not keep
Thee longer in suspense and pain,
But briefly will at once explain
All that has happen'd since that night

So deep with grief and blood bedight.
But, stay—thy brother bade me say
He waits thy summons anxiously ;
And, see ! e'en now he comes this way.”

With eager steps young Ethelred
Drew near De Lacey’s humble bed.
He wore a garb of Lincoln green,
Such as Sir Hildebrand had seen
Worn by the band of Rangers bold
Carousing in their secret hold.
He was a gallant youth, o'er whom
Scare twenty years had shed their bloom ;
And comlier form, or nobler mein
Adorning manhood ne'er was seen.

“ Ethelred,” cried Sir Hildebrand,
Grasping his brother’s proffer’d hand,
“ I do implore thee to believe
How deeply, bitterly I grieve
That jealous vengeance, dark and deep,
Should have impell’d my soul to steep
Itself so fearfully in guilt.
But, the compunction I have felt—
Even before I came to know
On whom had fall’n the treacherous blow—
Has prov’d to me a living hell :
Each matin chime—each vesper bell
I’ve wish’d had heen my funeral knell.

And, oh! how zealously I've striven
To appease the wrath of anger'd Heaven
By mortifying flesh and soul,
To Him who doth our fates controul,
Is only known. But list, while I
Relate a tale of treachery
As foul, as deep as e'er possess'd
A villian's, or a demon's breast.

“One eve, a private message came,
Sign'd with our kinsman Oswald's name,
Conjuring me, within an hour,
To bend my steps to Kirkstall's bow'r,
Where he would meet me, and disclose
Certain intrigues of secret foes.
Promptly the summons I obeyed,
And, when the twilight fell, I strayed
Down by dark Airedale's quiet stream:—
A storm was rising, and the gleam
Of vivid lightning thro' the wood
Soon show'd where Oswald, waiting, stood.
There he, in an accursed tale,
Denounce'd the Lady Helen frail—
Told me that she had broke her plight,
By favouring a stranger Knight:
And having wrought my tortur'd soul
Beyond the bounds of all controul,
He then, by well tim'd argument,
Protested that the punishment

Such flagrant insult called for, should
Be written in my rival's blood.

“ Stung to the quick, in fiercest wrath,
I madly chose the fearful path
The arch-fiend open'd to my view.
He then, to prove his statement true,
Told me, upon that very night,
Fair Helen and the stranger Knight
Met at their fav'rite trysting spot,—
By vengeance spurred, that spot I sought,
I watch'd, and soon a dusky form
Loom'd 'mid the glimmering of the storm.
I track'd it to a lonely dell,
And there, within a humble cell
A feeble, struggling taper's light
Dimly reveal'd to me a sight
Which seem'd to sear my very heart,
And cause my burning eyes to start:
I saw a lovely female form
Reclining on a warrior's arm.
I waited not to mark them more,
But hurried from the half-clos'd door:—
That glimpse, I felt, suffic'd to prove
The blight of all my hopes, and love.

What follow'd I can scarce relate:
With throbbing brain did I await
My fancied rival's coming forth.

Anon he came ; and with the wrath
Which madden'd fiends alone can feel,
Deep in his breast I plung'd my steel.
'Twas then—alas ! too late—I found
My brother stretch'd upon the ground !—
With horror dumb, aghast I stood—
I saw him weltering in his blood—
I stagger'd—shriek'd—and fled the spot,
But whither I remember not.
But little more have I to tell ;—
Within a hermit's lonely cell,
When consciousness return'd, I lay,
And a good Friar attentively
Bent o'er me as I op'd my eyes :—
I glar'd around in mute surprise.
An indistinct, but fear-fraught gleam,
Like traces of some frightful dream,
Shot o'er my mind, as meteors fly
With wild flash, through the midnight sky.
The Father sooth'd and sought to calm
My agony with the soft balm
Religion yields ; but vainly strove :—
Remembrance of the past night drove
Me almost frantic ; and I felt
To ease my conscience of its guilt,
My fearful crime must be confessed ;
But ere my purpose was expressed,
By gentle hints the Father threw,
I found that he already knew

My hand had done the horrid deed ;
And he conjur'd me to proceed
Without delay to Kirkstall's shrine,
And there beseech the Pow'r Divine,
By fasting, penitence, and pray'r,
To shrive my soul. With Christian care
He then prompt preparation made,
And soon, in pilgrim's guise array'd,
I gladly sanctuary sought
Within the hallow'd gates ; but naught
That Abbey-wall or shrine could yield
A conscience so enstain'd could shield
From the keen tortures of remorse,
Which each day gave augmented force.
The worthy Friar each ev'ning came,
Imploring me, in Heaven's name,
Not to give way to dark despair,
But hope, and trust in God, who ne'er
Forsakes the truly penitent,
However deep with crime besprent.
But hope, I felt, had fled for aye
My wither'd heart ; and from that day
Until th' events of yester-e'en,
My weary hours of life have been
A raging, overwhelming sea
Of care and ceaseless misery."

" My brother," cried young Ethelred,
Most cruelly wert thou misled :

A deeper, or more heartless plan
Never disgrac'd the name of man.
That traitor, Oswald, thought, 'tis plain,
A rich inheritance to gain
By crushing with his hellish snares
De Lacey's rightful, lineal heirs.
But let me now succinctly tell
What led me to the Hermit's cell
Upon that fated, luckless night,
That all may be explained aright.

“Thou knowest well 'twas my design
To sail, ere long, for Palestine,
And with my chosen warriors swell
Our ranks against the Infidel.
The Lady Hermione de Grey—
Whom how I love I need not say—
Beneath her watchful guardian's care
Was so constrain'd she scarce could e'er
Elude his vigilance an hour
To meet me in old Kirkstall's bow'r.
Yet did we meet, tho' seldom, and
Knowing that for the Holy Land
I shortly must depart, we plann'd
That night to meet within the dell—
Our trysting-place the Hermit's cell—
To plight our vows, and bid farewell.
How that dark villain, Oswald, came
So true a knowledge to obtain

Of our assignment, is to me
Impenetrable mystery."

"Methinks that I have power, Sir Knight,
Upon this point to throw a light,"
Exclaim'd the Friar:—then cast away
His pilgrim's garb of sober grey,
His silv'ry beard, and sable hood—
And, lo! before their eyes there stood
A powerful man, of gallant mein,
Clad in a frock of hunter's green.
Sir Hildebrand, with mute amaze,
Bent on the Forester his gaze,
Doubting that he beheld aright
In him the former Anchorite.

"Sir Hildebrand De Lacey, thou
Canst not but be surpris'd, I trow,
To find beneath such priestly gear
A hardy chaser of the deer.
This proves, howe'er, we must not deem
All men precisely what they seem,"
Continued he in cheerful tone,—
"In truth, Sir Knight, thou look'st upon
The outlaw'd Earl of Huntingdon.
My fame, no doubt, thou oft hast heard
Proclaim'd: and tho' it is averr'd
That I'm a robber:—'tis my boast
That tho' some few broad coins are lost,

And now and then a good fat deer
By haughty rich ones, 'twill appear
That while I tax their ample store,
I ne'er oppress or fleece the poor ;
But ever lend a helping hand
To all who chance in need to stand.
But mark me:—oft I take delight
In wandering abroad, bedight
In monkish garb ; and few can tell
The ruse ; I grace the cowl so well.
I' faith a Bishop oft has seen
Me thus, and none the wiser been
Until I lighten'd up his soul
By forcing him to pay my toll ;
And hinting that his Lordship stood
Upon the see of Robin Hood.

“ 'Tis now some three moons past and gone
Since I resolved to taste the fawn,
And well-fed game of flood and field,
Which Kirkstall's fat lands ever yield.
Oft-times before had I been here,
And feasted on fowl, fish, and deer ;
Therefore, I knew right well that I
Could not but fare right royally.
So, choosing out some twenty men—
Rare jovial comrades—to this glen
I straight repair'd, resolv'd to stay
And spend the winter merrily.

“ One eve, it chanc’d, that having stroll’d
Beyond the bounds of Kirkstall’s fold,
In Ranger’s gear, with bow in hand,
I enter’d on Sir Oswald’s land ;
And soon, from ’neath a shrub-crown’d crag,
Sprang forth a noble spotted stag.
My bow I in an instant drew,
And, swift as thought, the arrow flew—
It pierc’d its heart—and, with a bound,
The beast fell bleeding on the ground.
But scarcely had I reach’d the spot,
When I was grappled by the throat
By two stout Foresters ; and tho’
I spar’d not either word or blow,
They prov’d themselves right hardy blades,
And dragging me thro’ groves and glades,
Soon clos’d on me the castle gate,
And led me where Sir Oswald sate.
My crime made known, with boding frown,
He bade my gaolers bear me down
Into the dungeon, there to bide
His pleasure, ’till he should decide
Upon such punishment as he
Should deem sufficient penalty.

“ Some three long hours had pass’d away,
When, as within my cell I lay,
Reflecting on the by-gone day,
A cautious foot-fall struck my ear,

And presently a hand, with care,
Withdrew the bolts which bound my door—
A dim light stream'd upon the floor—
I sprang upon my feet, and there
Before me stood Sir Oswald Blair.

“ Briefly, he came to tell that I
Must hold myself prepared to die,
Unless I would at once consent
T' avert th' impending punishment,
By ridding him of one, whose life,
To him, with bitterness was rife.
A rival with success had strove
To steal from him a maiden's love.
A menial had, by stealth, convey'd
The tidings, that beneath the shade,
Of Airedale's lonely hazel bow'r,
Next eve they met at twilight hour.
He offer'd me the alternative—
To swear to do the deed, and live ;
Or to reject his clemency,
And the next morn, at sunrise, die.

“ But little time I took to muse
Upon the course I ought to choose.
His foul proposal with deep scorn
I shrunk from ; and my answer, borne
In words his heart could ill sustain,
Told how completely he'd mista'en,

The principles of him who lay
In durance 'neath his tyranny.
He spoke no more ; but, with a scowl,
Which told how winc'd the villain's soul,
Quitted the cell : and wrapt in gloom,
I waited my impending doom.

“ The rising moon beam'd forth, anon,
And thro' the dungeon grating shone :
With listless eye, upon the wall
I watch'd the clear cold radiance fall ;
'Till, presently, the light revealed
A glittering object, half concealed
Behind a jutting stone. A thought
Shot thro' my brain,—with speed I sought
To prove how far I judg'd aright—
With trembling hand a pressure slight
I laid upon the spot—and true
To my suspicion, backward flew
A small slab from the dungeon floor,
Discovering an iron door.
The rusted latch I wrench'd away,
And, with a light heart, grop'd my way
Along a passage damp and dark ;
And, ere long, I beheld a spark
Fitfully gleaming from afar,
Like some predestin'd guiding star.
Sway'd by alternate hope and fear,
With careful footsteps I drew near

The spot : there, plainly, once had been
A secret door-way ; and between
The rude-built mass of rock and clay
Which chok'd the outlet, a faint ray
Stream'd far above me thro' a breach,
Which vainly I essay'd to reach. —
Still hard I clamber'd, and, at length,
By dint of care and sinewy strength,
I well nigh gain'd the chink—when down
The ponderous, crumbling mass was thrown
With a loud crash beneath my weight ;
And when I stagger'd to my feet
I stood within my own retreat !

“ Thus having, by a lucky chance,
And the good will of Providence,
Escap'd the clutches of the fiend,
I readily, with reason, deem'd
That tho' he'd fail'd in the attempt
To gain my aid, he'd ne'er content
His vengeful soul, until grim death
Had seal'd his hatred rival's breath.
Accordingly, I studied how
I might avert th' impending blow.
I soon determin'd to repair
Next eve to Kirkstall's bower, where
The lovers plann'd to meet, and there
Impart the danger hovering nigh,
And warn them, for their lives to fly.

“ With this intent, at night’s dark hour,
In Hermit’s garb, I sought the bower:
But ere I reach’d the spot, a cry
Of fearful wildness rent the sky.
In the direction of the sound
I hasten’d swiftly on, and found
A wounded youth stretch’d on the ground,
Lifeless, and weltering in blood;
While over him th’ assassin stood.
But scarcely had I reach’d the scene,
When, as if waking from a dream,
The perpetrator of the deed
Rush’d down the glade with maniac speed.
A portion of my trusty band,
Who hover’d nigh, at my command
Sprang from their covert in the wood,
And close the fugitive pursu’d;
While I, with two stout comrades’ aid,
The fallen youth to our cave convey’d.
But little more I need to say:
Long ere the dawn of coming day,
Apt remedies with skill applied
Had staunch’d life’s swiftly ebbing tide.
Few words suffic’d for him to tell
’Twas by his brother’s hand he fell:—
He mark’d thy visage ’mid the light
The storm-flash shed upon the night;—
And I, at once, became full well
Convinc’d that some infernal spell,

Concocted by dark Oswald's brain,
Had tempted thee thy hand to stain
By lifting it, with vengeance rise,
Against thy only brother's life.

“ But little did I dream that there
Lay in the brain of Oswald Blair
So deep a mine of treachery ;
For know, Sir Hildebrand, that he
Already has, with grasping hands,
Usurp'd thy noble rights and lands :—
And altho' formerly he'd plann'd
To gain the fair and dowried hand
Of Lady Hermione De Grey,
His eye now gloats on richer prey ;—
His curst ambition covets now
The daughter of De Poitou.
The Baron, blinded by his wiles,
Upon his suit approving smiles :
But Lady Helen deeply mourns
Thy fancied loss, and proudly scorns
Sir Oswald's suit ; and tho' her sire
Threatens her with his lasting ire
If she declines perversely still
To yield submission to his will,
No threats her firm resolve can move,
Or swerve her from her former love.

“ Upon Sir Oswald's plottings I

Have kept a close and watchful eye.
He spread abroad an artful tale,
Which to gain credence did not fail,
That bitter enmity had sprung
Betwixt his kinsmen, from some wrong
Sir Ethelred had heap'd on thee;
And, in the heat of enmity,
That thou hadst slain Sir Ethelred,
And from thy native country fled.

“ My followers, who on thy track
Had vainly sped, ere long came back ;
And with no tidings could I meet
To give a clue to thy retreat,
Until, by chance, the other night
I mark'd an aged Anchorite
Gliding among the hazels tall
Which skirt the Abbey-cloister wall.
Some pebbles by his hand were thrown
Against a lattice, whence forth shone
A feeble light ; I watch'd with care,
Longing to learn what brought him there.
He enter'd by a secret way—
I follow'd, and in ambush lay
Behind a pillar.—Presently,
Bearing a lamp, a Monk appeared,
And as my hiding-place he neared
The features I could plainly trace ;
And in that haggard, care-worn face,

Where naught, save suffering, seemed to live,
I saw the long-sought fugitive.

“ I traec’d the Hermit to his cell,
Within a deep sequester’d dell ;
And, blinded by my priestly gear,
The good man told me, without fear,
How, on a dark tempestuous night,
Like a wild, conscience-tortur’d sprite,
Thou rushed’st thro’ his half op’d door,
And senseless fell upon the floor :
How from thy ravings he had gained
A knowledge that thy hands were stained
By some mysterious, bloody deed :
How he’d advis’d thee to proceed
To Kirkstall’s hallow’d shrine, and there
Atonement make by fast and pray’r.
Thy brother here, altho’, as yet,
Scarce strong enough his couch to quit,
On hearing my discovery,
Resolv’d, without delay, that he
Next eve, in company with me,
Would to the cloister-court repair,
And dissipate thy dark despair.
What follow’d, I’ve no need to tell :
Thank Heaven, all, so far, is well.

“ But the catastrophe draws nigh,—
To crush Sir Oswald’s villainy

Sir Ethelred and I have plann'd
A scheme. To thee, Sir Hildebrand,
To-morrow morn we will explain :
All things are now in perfect train.

“ But come, the hour is waxing late,
Our presence my blithe comrades wait ;
Cheer up, Sir Knights, forget all care,
And join us in our homely fare.”
The brothers grasp'd each other's hands
With thankful hearts—Sir Hildebrand's,
So late by hopeless anguish riven,
Seem'd lifted to the realms of Heaven.

But here we leave the twain to greet
The Foresters in their retreat,
And feast on venison and ale
While we pursue our humble tale.

CANTO THE THIRD.

Sir Oswald sate in his gloomy hall
As the shades of night began to fall :
Now darkly he scowl'd—now a fiendish smile
O'erspread his sinister features, while
By fits and starts he cast his eye
Towards the door impatiently.
'Twas seldom Oswald Blair was seen
So to relax his frigid mein.
As the volcano fiercely glows
Amid perpetual frost and snows,
So, 'neath his cold exterior,
Dark passions wag'd continual war
Within his heart ; and hellish schemes
Beset his day-thoughts and his dreams.
But scarcely ever aught betrayed
In look or word the plots arrayed
Against his foes with deadly mark.
Yet now an agonizing spark
Of apprehension sear'd his breast
Like heated iron. He could not rest
Assured that De Lacey's heirs

Were safely trammell'd by his snares.
He felt assured that Hildebrand
Had raised his vengeance-tempted hand
Against his brother. In the glade
The blood-stain'd grass full well betray'd
The perpetration of the deed ;
But then he never could succeed
In finding where the corse was lain ;
All his research had proved vain.
This state of vague uncertainty
Tortur'd his conscience night and day.
A dark misgiving, fraught with fear,
Constantly whispered in his ear
That retribution hovered near.
'Twas galling thus to find the goal
Whereon his dark, ambitious soul
For years its proudest hopes had built
Their pinnacle 'mid foulest guilt,
Constantly threatening to sink,
And topple o'er destruction's brink.

Three moons had wasted since that night
With treachery and blood bedight,
When the De Lacey's disappeared ;
And quickly now Sir Oswald neared
The climax of his guilty pride :
Fair Helen was to be his bride.
That night, by her stern Sire's command,
She was to yield to Blair her hand.

As in his hall, absorbed by thought,
He sate, his ear a footfall caught;
And presently, with gentle tread,
A yonthful Page came in :—he said,
“ Sir Knight, the hour is waxing late,
Th’ assembled guests impatient wait
Your presence,—so they bade me tell.”
“ I come,” replied the Knight; “ ‘tis well.”
Then, rising with a nervous start,
He strove to rouse his blenching heart.
“ What means this cowardice,” he cried
With bitterness, “ I would deride
Such fears within a woman’s breast :
Why cannot I securely rest
In peace upon my deep-laid plan ?
Rouse—rouse thee, Oswald, be a man.”
Then snatch’d his rapier from the wall,
And hurriedly strode from the hall.

'Twas midnight ; and the dazzling blaze,
Created by the flashing rays
A hundred tapers gave,
Illum'd the Abbey Chapel, where
A host of Knights and Ladies fair,
Assembled in the nave,
Welcomed a gorgeous bridal throng,
As gallantly it moved along
The lofty, echoing aisle.

Sir Oswald near the Altar stood,
 And as th' approaching group he view'd,
 With a triumphant smile
 His gloomy features were o'erspread :
 His lip curl'd proudly as he sped
 To greet his noble Bride.
 With haughty step the Maiden came,
 While from her eyes beam'd forth a flame
 Of mingled scorn and pride.
 The Knight essay'd her hand to clasp ;
 But, shrinking from his proffer'd grasp,
 As tho' a death-infusing asp
 Had wound its fearful coil
 Around her snowy arm, she cried—
 “ Traitor ! stand back ! or else abide
 The wrath of one, who, near thy side,
 Thy foul intents to foil,
 Now hovers :—aye, well may'st thou quail—
 Well may thy cheek turn ghastly pale.
 Villain ! mark me—the time hath come
 For God and Man to seal thy doom !”

As a tree, shiver'd by the flash
 Which heralds the fierce thunder's crash,
 Vibrates and totters ere its fall,
 So did that Maiden's words appall
 The guilt-stain'd soul of Oswald Blair :—
 With trembling limbs and vacant stare

He gaz'd on her,—she seemed to hold,
Like the famed Pythoness of old,
His fate within her grasp:—a spell,
Which all his efforts could not quell,
Seem'd his heart's inmost fount to freeze,
And paralyze his faculties.

“Sir Oswald Blair, what means this show,”
Exclaim'd the Baron de Poitou,
“Of perturbation; doth thy fire
Shrink thus before a woman's ire?—
Daughter, attend,” he sternly said,
Hath all thy maiden softness fled?—
Who taught thee, girl, to cross my will?
At once, if thou my child art still,
To Oswald Blair resign thine hand,
Nor dare dispute thy Sire's command.”
Sir Priest, proceed,” he loudly cried:
“Sir Oswald Blair, lead forth thy Bride!”

The Knight towards the Maiden sprung,
His nerves by desperation strung—
His passions by deep vengeance fann'd—
And seiz'd, perforce, her struggling hand.
Just then, forth from a pillar's shade,
A form, in mantle dark array'd,
Glided into the dazzling blaze,
And while his steady, piercing gaze

He bent upon the recreant Blair,
He sternly shouted—" Hold !—Forbear !"
Amazement seiz'd the startled throng,
As to the ground his cloak he flung :—
For, lo ! revealed before them stood
The far-famed outlaw, Robin Hood !

“ What, ho !” he cried, “ my valiant Knight,
Come forth into the honest light.
Why shrink ye thus ?—I’ faith, ’twould seem
Ye entertain some vacant dream
That we before have met. Stand forth,
While I proclaim thy sterling worth.
Thou wilt not come ?—Then, coward, hear
Such words as shall o’erwhelm with fear
Thy heart, and prove thy perfidy
Before this goodly company.
I here proclaim thee traitor !—Aye,
Before God’s Holy Host, I say
Thou art a villain, who for gold
Thy peace of mind—thy soul, hast sold,
Who strove by foul, demoniac snares
To crush De Lacey’s rightful heirs ;
Who plotted murder, and imbu’d
A brother’s hand in brother’s blood.
I come not ’neath this hallow’d roof
Thus to arraign thee without proof.
Sir Hildebrand, thou’st falsely said,
Hath, blood-stain’d, from his country fled.

That thou hast lied shall soon appear,—
Behold ! my witnesses are here !”

So saying, from his vest he drew
A silver hunting horn, and blew
A startling blast, both loud and long,
Which through the roof in echoes rung ;
And entering by a secret way,
From the south transept, presently
Rush'd forth a small, but gallant band
Of Foresters with bows in hand,
Already strung ; and at their head
Came Hildebrand and Ethelred.

With mute astonishment the throng
Beheld :—the beauteous Helen sprung
Towards her Knight with joy-fraught shriek,
And senseless fell upon his neck.

“ Oswald,” exclaim’d Sir Hildebrand,
While loathingly the wretch he scann’d—
“ False traitor ! too long hath this hand
And my good falchion strangers been ;
But now, by yon high Altar’s sheen,
I swear to prove thy vaunted might,—
I challenge thee to mortal fight,
And may just God defend the right !”

Awhile Sir Oswald silent gazed

Upon the scene ; then proudly raised
His gaunt form to its fullest height,
As if concentrating all his might
For one last effort. "What," he said,
"Hath my ambition, then, been fed
By years of bootless hope, to be
Crush'd at its climax, thus, by thee ?—
De Lacey, mark me : man hath ne'er
Exulted yet o'er Oswald Blair,
Nor ever shall :—thus, thus I now
My vengeance seal, and overthrow
Thy triumph at a single blow !"

Forth from its sheath he tore his brand,
And rush'd upon Sir Hildebrand ;—
But ere the villain's treacherous hand
Could plant the steel, young Ethelred
Sprang forward, and struck down the blade.
Now wildly glar'd the baffled fiend,
His eyes like flaming embers seem'd,
As with a shrill, unearthly cry
He whirl'd his flashing brand on high,
And with a madden'd tiger's might,
Darted upon the youthful Knight.
Sir Ethelred stood well prepared,
Like lightning his bright blade was bared ;
Right gallantly he met his foe,
And fiercely dealt him blow for blow.
Hotly they fought ; but Lacey's sword,

Ere long, pass'd thro' Sir Oswald's guard—
 It pierc'd his heart—and with a yell
 Of agony he reeled and fell.
 And in a crimson, welling flood
 Around the Altar flow'd his blood.
 He gave one curse—a gasp—a groan—
 And Oswald's guilty soul had flown.

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Returning Spring bestrewed the earth with
 flowers,

And clad in emerald robes the glades and bowers ;
 The lark, on dew gemm'd wing, was soaring high,
 With jocund song, towards the bright blue sky ;
 And o'er the tranquil, variegated scene
 Morn shed a charm, soft, smiling, and serene.
 Upon De Lacey's tower the banner streamed
 Once more in peace, and thereon proudly gleamed
 The blended 'scutcheons of De Poiton
 And proud De Lacey, in the sunbeam's glow.
 Trouble had faded, like a fearful dream,
 And happiness, unsullied, reign'd supreme.

* * * * *

O'ershadowed by the cloister's heavy gloom,
 A solitary, roughly-chisseled tomb
 Rear'd its dark crest, and mark'd where, turn'd to
 clay,

The bones of the once powerful Oswald lay.
A simple cross and sword adorn'd the stone:
But no inscription to the spirit flown
Memorial of rank or virtues gave—
It stood alone—and told the Traitor's grave.

THE END.



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